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TWO MASTERPIECES OF RENAISSANCE PAINTING

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CARL W. HAMILTON

NEW YORK CITY

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TWO MASTERPIECES OF RENAISSANCE PAINTING ANALYZED

BY RICHARD OFFNER

BY a happy chance Mr. Hamilton's two pictures illustrate different aspects of the most vitally creative moment in Florentine painting; and by an odd coincidence both variously derive from the same formative source, that of the mighty Masaccio. Piero's by an affinity of genius—although he was born in Borgo S. Sepolcro—is the more profoundly Florentine, and Piero, Masaccio's greatest stylistic heir; perhaps the greatest artist Italy produced in the 15th century, and that should mean Europe.

His sublime frescoes in Arezzo, Borgo S. Sepolcro and Rimini apart, he left a small number of supreme masterpieces on panel: a Flagellation, and a Madonna in Urbino; a Nativity, a Baptism, and a St. Michael in the National Gallery; an altar-piece in the Brera; another in the Pinacoteca Vannucci, Perugia; a St. Jerome in the Venice Academy; a St. Thomas Aquinas in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum in Milan; and the two ducal portraits in the Uffizi. There remains the small picture here discussed, which is the only painting by Piero still in private hands.

This presents the Crucifixion as a solemn and fateful epic. The event is neither fugitive nor emotionally acute: it stands impassive against all time, an indestructible fact; not as the tragedy of Christ designed to move us, but as an expression of necessity intended to illuminate us on a course of things that cannot be determined or averted by anything man can do. Its meaning roots in an order older and more radical than humanity, and deeper even than His doom. Out of its gay and gracious colour with its gold sky (a very unexpected feature), out of the varied humanity below the body of the Crucified blossoms, naked and alone, only a hint of the shadow of death hanging about Him. The head, torso and outspread arms seen across the luminous empty space, irrelative, in mute solitariness, rise above the earth and its creatures, and become part of timeless infinity: a great dead figure without a self and without a present. All effect is scorned, and while the tragedy is brought home to us in the action, its power is inherent in His mere plastic presence, which is like a force coming from within.

As Christ is parcel of a latent order, so He is part of the music of the composition, the main lines of which spring from the more opulent masses

of white upon dark at the sides, and converge symmetrically in an enclosing triangle, that holds the different elements of the composition compactly; firmly maintaining the Cross at its centre. This rises out of the parallel pyramid of the soldiers drawing lots, traverses the landscape, and soars, bearing its burden, into the gold. The motif of the triangle runs through it, like a melodic phrase in a symphony, but also as a factor of integration; articulating the smaller groups and units, and assimilating them rhythmically in the entire composition; thus the captain, the holy women and the tree; the seated and kneeling figures below; the horsemen on the right; and so also the outstretched arms of Christ, which are organically assimilated into the composition by diagonals that spread from the feet of the seated soldiers. We almost see them descend by the force of this assimilation, and envelope the group below. Against the wide, abstract, luminous gold they seem to hold the power to embrace the whole world.

The composition rises majestically like a façade out of the flat rock, steadied by the erect standards at the sides, in front of the ground that swells uniformly and plastically to a near horizon. Every figure or object cut in a clear pattern, is also fashioned to a solid, calculable in its depth. The colour, knowingly graduated in light and shade, bestows on every form its unmistakable cubic existence, and its place in depth. The cool, abundant illumination, modelling by its complementary dark, throws a shadow that binds the solid explicitly to the space; and where the light, encountering nothing, comes through, it creates a void, as actual as a transparent solid. Thus used, the light organizes the filled space and the empty space to a tight reciprocity, and the reality of nearer depth rings out with miraculous clearness and finality.

But in according a sharp articulation to the form and space, and a just differentiation of the compositional elements, the light serves to integrate the picture to a fuller and deeper unity. Thus enriched, the composition moves and evolves before us in terms of its structure. We follow the foreshortened horseman at the left, and the overlapping masses at the right, in and out of the variegated groups; and lingering at the three soldiers in the foreground we encircle them and are swept upward over the John and the Maries to the Cross.

Tuscan painting never reached a greater formal energy held in completer equilibrium, a profounder vision, a greater perfection of style than in Piero. But there was a tendency in Florence running parallel to its classic purity which, founded on tragic feeling and pathos, was a rebellion against its intellectualism. Emotion and sensibility to emotion, were its determinants; and to this tendency belongs Mr. Hamilton's tenderly poetic Madonna. Here the psychological moment predominates, and we see the Virgin lost in passionate abstraction, as if Her anxiety about Her precious possession crowded Her mind with all imaginable dangers. Her head hangs with the weight of Her thought, which almost visibly passes over

Her dreamy face. The Christ's face, because it is pitched on the same diagonal, invites a contrast with Hers; and while she is deeply absorbed He glances outward, suddenly interrupted in His action, His eye arrested an instant by the worshipper. But His head turns gently not to ruffle Her mood, which has relaxed a little the firmness of Her hold; but instead, Her left arm, covered by the dark blue mantle, is in the act of enfolding Her Child more completely. A cool creeping light moves with the mood of the intimate drama. The two figures are locked inextricably in a mass that rises, according to good Florentine tradition, like architecture into the space; in a relief that swells forward in a delicate gradation from the half-shadow to a fulness of volume. The group detaches itself from the richly figured gold brocade of the background, and is well on this side of it. This is consummately achieved by establishing the plane of the gold stuff, which, hanging behind the ledge back of the Madonna, in absolute symmetry, is caught up at the centre with the large circular halo spread against it on the same axis. The repeated pattern of a sharply incised motif across it further emphasizes its flatness and its position. By contrast, the group with its broken silhouette, with its swelling roundness, its caressing chiaroscuro, its lively contrasts of colour, its cool rosiness of the flesh, is more conclusively determined in its deep poetic meaning.

But if in Piero relief is a direct revelation of ultimate reality, it serves here to elaborate and amplify the poetic feeling. Mr. Hamilton's Madonna might stand for the tendency in Florentine painting to humanize sacred legend, or rather to represent divine motherhood as a human fate; which produced a type that reached its highest popularity with Fra Filippo Lippi. Speaking of this Madonna Mr. Berenson "can recall no other picture by this most human of Florentine painters which is so glowing and so radiant. . . . I am very much struck" he continues, "by the resemblance, not only in the feeling but in the pattern as well, between this Madonna of Fra Filippo's and some of the great Venetian's (i.e. Giovanni Bellini's) early Madonnas. There is good reason for it because both drew their inspiration directly from Donatello; and, besides, Fra Filippo left works at Padua which the young Bellini may well have known. One wishes, like Bellini, Fra Filippo had painted more such tender, thoughtful Madonnas, and of such delightful colour. Unhappily, they are rare, scarcely half a dozen are at all the equal of this."

THE CRUCIFIXION

BY PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

THE FOLLOWING IS A TRANSCRIPTION OF THE
DUVEEN BROCHURE, TOGETHER WITH
MORE RECENT MATERIAL REGARDING

THE CRUCIFIXION

BY
PIETRO DEI FRANCESCHI

CALLED
PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

UMBRIAN SCHOOL
CIRCA 1406-1492

A FIFTEENTH CENTURY
OIL AND TEMPERA PAINTING
ON WOOD

FROM THE COLLECTION OF
MARCO ANTONIO COLONNA
PRINCE OF PALIANO

THE CRUCIFIXION

BY PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

In the centre of the composition Christ is seen nailed to the Cross, the body drawn simply as that of an inert man, reposeful, and without any sign of suffering. The Virgin, in blue mantle, is seen at the left, near the foot of the Cross, supported by St. Mary Magdalene in red mantel and flowing hair, and at the back by Mary and Martha; whilst St. John the Evangelist, in rose-coloured mantle, stands in a supplicating manner towards the Cross at the right. In the centre foreground three soldiers are drawing lots for the purple robe upon which they are seated. A centurion on horseback, at the left, is raising his hands in adoration, behind him being Roman lance and banner bearers. On the extreme right a horseman raises his stave authoritatively towards the Cross, and before him there are more lance and banner bearers, some carrying shields upon which are the initials of *Senatus Populus-Que Romani.* The background is formed of a group of low hills, with two large trees in the middle distance. The sky space is entirely of gold.

. . . . . .

The scene appears thronged with horsemen, with flags and banners, and upright spears; and in the absence of all the more barbarous features, assumes a kind of splendour seldom associated with the Crucifixion. Throughout the picture the masses of light and shade are managed with the utmost skill, and the deep dark and high lights are very strongly contrasted. The figures seem to fall naturally into ordered form, and indicate to a large extent the geometrical training of the master's hand and eye.

The Christ is probably drawn from the same model who served for the Christ in the *Flagellation* at Urbino, and there is much similarity to the Christ in the Altar-piece of the *Madonna della Misericordia* in the Chapel of the Hospital at Borgo San Sepolcro. The figure of St. John the Evangelist also possesses a great likeness to the one in the latter painting, which is considered to be the earliest of Piero's extant pictures.

The landscape is in Piero's ordinary style, but somewhat more carefully handled than usual. The horses, inspired presumably by his assiduous study of antique forms, are nevertheless full of life and admirably drawn; and the grouping of the soldiers and the detail of their costumes and helmets, the disposition of the uplifted spears and banners, remind us somewhat of the larger group in the same artist's *Defeat and Death of Chrosroes, King of Persia,* in the Church of San Francesco, Arezzo.

Size of panel: 14 *inches by* 16 *inches.*

BERNHARD BERENSON

AUTHOR OF "THE STUDY AND CRITICISM OF ITALIAN ART"

"LORENZO LOTTO"

"FLORENTINE PAINTERS OF THE RENAISSANCE", ETC.

IN A LETTER RELATING TO PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA'S

"THE CRUCIFIXION"

". . . Although of small size, it is large in scale, and produces nearly the same impression as his famous frescoes at Arezzo. What differences there are are rather in favour of *The Crucifixion*.

"Besides the qualities of grandeur, aloofness and impersonality, besides the qualities of drawing and modelling which we find in all his authentic works, *The Crucifixion* shows qualities of colour and handling that are a revelation. I should be at a loss to point to any other Italian work that was of a colour at once so powerful, and yet neither warm nor cold, but fused in a manner soft and harmonious.

"We are reminded of Giorgione, and, indeed, nothing could be more Giorgionesque in colour than, for instance, the soldiers throwing dice for the garment of Our Lord.

"Other paintings of Piero must have had such strong, beautiful colouring, but elsewhere it has faded, leaving paler and feebler tints behind.

"The handling of *The Crucifixion* reminds me of Cézanne. It has become a commonplace to assert that this greatest of modern French masters had a sense of form and a feeling for atmosphere and placing singularly like Piero's. It was left to *The Crucifixion* to reveal how curiously alike these two great artists are in handling as well . . ."

(*signed*) B. BERENSON

COPY OF EXCERPT FROM LETTER TO DUVEEN BROTHERS FROM MR. BERNHARD BERENSON

DATED APRIL 25, 1915

. . . In the first place I want to tell you that a few days ago a marvelous picture was brought to me which was so beautiful that I looked at it for hours. It is by PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA, *and I have never seen anything grander in conception and more exquisitely painted. In my eyes and in my taste it is an absolutely perfect work of art. The only possible drawback is that the subject is* "THE CRUCIFIXION." *Do not think for a moment that it contains anything grotesque or painful—far from that. It is noble and intellectual and at the same time as resplendent as a jewel. It is on a panel and its size about* 18 *inches by* 15 *inches. The thing is not far enough advanced to procure a photograph. When it is obtainable I shall send you one. But who knows if it will ever get through to you?* . . .*

* NOTE: This refers to the war period.

COPY OF LETTER FROM MR. BERNHARD BERENSON TO DUVEEN BROTHERS

DATED MAY 3, 1915

. . . I have just returned from a week spent studying PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA *at Arezzo, Borgo San Sepolcro and Perugia. Three fourths at least of his works are there. I write to assure you that the little Crucifixion that I proposed to you in my last, stands comparison with the best I have seen in fresco and far surpasses anything in panel. That great master never drew better, and to my knowledge, considering the present state of his paintings, never colored so well. In brief, I have seldom been roused by a work of art as I am by this one. And as I told you in my last the subject, although a Crucifixion, is treated with the utmost beauty. Not a grimace anywhere. Surely if it were a Van Eyck nobody would hesitate to buy a Crucifixion, despite Flemish exaggerations.* PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA *is for an Italian singularly like Van Eyck, but very much greater still. If ever you see this picture, you will share my enthusiasm. Surely if Frick could be induced to buy the grimacing dead Christ falsely ascribed to Antonello da Messina, it should not be hard to persuade him or his like to acquire such a gem as this by such a very great master.*

Cordially,

B. BERENSON

COPY OF LETTER FROM MR. BERNHARD BERENSON

TO CARL W. HAMILTON

DATED JULY 24, 1927

. . . *You ask me my opinion of your* "CRUCIFIXION" *by* PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA. *I can refer you to my volume on "The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance" for my general view of this supreme artist, one of the grandest who ever painted; and then, if I tell you that your picture shows him at his best, you will understand how very highly I value this monumental work. Small as it is, it is as grand and noble and impressive as any of his larger paintings. . . .*

FROM AN ARTICLE BY RICHARD OFFNER

IN "THE ARTS", MAY, 1924

. . . But the effect of the great Morgan Castagno, the solemn Crucifixion by Piero della Francesca and the dreamy Fra Filippo is deeper and more tenacious. . . .

If Castagno was one of the greatest masters of form the world has ever known, the genius of Piero della Francesca, who painted the small Crucifixion, was completer, profounder and more temperate . . . It should be seen with persistence in its totality, for only so much detail has been set down as the eye requires in order to gather the separate objects into an integral composition. Only then will everything in the panel begin to take up its function and only then will it become evident how just, clear and satisfactory is the cubic relation of figures to the empty space of the foreground, and of the foreground to the total depth. The breaks in the rocky floor take you by measurable stages to the plane of the representation and within this, by foreshortening and by modelling, by overlapping of light and dark patches, the forms rise to a high degree of tridimensional existence. At the same time their bounding lines and surfaces are simplified in order to be more readily assimilated in the total mass, which is stabilized by the dominating symmetry of the cross and the horsemen right and left. While the picture thus becomes an organic structure of solid masses, its patterns are locked in perfectly harmonized design. But the composition is also organized as dramatic action. At the extreme left the transported upward glance of Longinus, at the extreme right the extended baton, at the centre the impetuous fervor of John, run together in a single convergence towards the crucified Christ.

There is no violence of sorrow anywhere in the mourners, no facile eloquence of agony in the crucified. Every gesture is declared without

complication or refinement by a direct act of externalization. How acute, in the midst of this impassivity, is the unaffected statement of the heaviness of that torso, the stretch of those arms and the beauty of that head!

The jagged outline and broken patches at the right are set against the quiet masses on the left, where the separate figures are held together in the triangular mass which rises to a point in the tree. Painted in the darkest tone on the surface, in a slightly withdrawn position, the Virgin is seen in a swoon.

Piero is a true Florentine in his origins. His form, his action, his gesture, his sobriety, he inherited from the great Masaccio. His decorative vision was formed by Paolo Uccello, whose painting manifests the same taste for pattern, the same orchestration of light and dark patches.

Our painting, like all of Piero's work, like the consummate Flagellation in the Urbino gallery, typifies a partial change in vision that was to be completed by Leonardo. The figure was no longer seen in plastic isolation, but as part of a given visual field. It no longer functioned merely as plastic energy, but became a factor in the articulation of space. The scale, the modelling, the painting of the figure, as of all objects, became conditional upon its position in depth; and the planes were treated with reference to a definite light.

Piero's genius is perfectly harmonized and lucid. The greatest mathematician of his day, his work is eminently clear; only that with Piero clarity, which is an intellectual attribute, becomes an aesthetic value. He avoids violent expression because he would rather reveal through the acquiescent consciousness of his figures and his wide landscapes the deeper action of primal force.

EXTRACT FROM AN ARTICLE ON THE HALF-CENTURY CELEBRATION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, BY WALTER PACH IN "THE FREEMAN" (NEW YORK, AUGUST 25, 1920)

A decision as to the most perfect master of the art of painting will fortunately never be reached; but if the futile attempt at such a choice were ever made, Piero must either be that choice or very near it. When one considers the extreme rarity of his easel-pictures, it becomes evident that the opportunity afforded by this little painting is inestimable.

EXTRACT FROM A LECTURE ON

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA AND SIGNORELLI

A RENAISSANCE MASTER AND PUPIL, BY WALTER PACH

In this marvelous work by Piero (the *Crucifixion* in the collection of Mr. Carl W. Hamilton) we see clearly the inspiration of Signorelli's treatment of the same subject at Morra. And from Signorelli, in his frescoes at Orvieto, to the Michael Angelo of the Sistine Chapel the step is again to be followed with ease. The absolute continuance of tradition in the Renaissance, the surety with which the master of one generation turned to the greatest man of the generation before and held to the principles of his work—even while new forms were appearing—is scarcely to be demonstrated elsewhere as clearly as it is in this august line which, reaching back to Paolo Uccello, includes the supreme figures of Italian art.

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

CIRCA 1406-1492

Pietro di Benedetto dei Franceschi, to give him his full name, a leading painter of the Umbrian School, was born at Borgo San Sepolcro, a city situated midway between Arezzo and Urbino. The exact date of Piero's birth cannot be fixed. He died in 1492, and if, as Vasari states, he lived eighty-six years, he must have been born in 1406. The master is generally named Piero della Francesca, and his father was a certain Benedetto dei Franceschi, a member of a family which had been established in the city for three generations, and had given seven members to the Consiglio del Commune. This Benedetto married Romana di Perino di Carlo da Monterchi, and he continued living during many years of Piero's career, dying, according to Signor Gaetano Milanesi, somewhere about the year 1465, a fact which contradicts Vasari's statement that the boy's education was left entirely to the care of his mother. The painter is also named Piero Borghese, from his birthplace, and judging from his signature on his works he would probably have called himself Pietro del Borgo. The true family name was as above stated, Franceschi, and descendants still exist under the name of Marini-Franceschi, and live in the master's native town of Borgo San Sepolcro.

Piero first received a scientific education, and became an adept in mathematics and geometry. This early bent of mind and course of study influenced to a large extent his development as a painter. Skilful in linear

perspective, he fixed rectangular planes in perfect order and measured them and thus got his figures in proportional height. He preceded and excelled Ghirlandajo in projecting shadows, and rendered with considerable truth atmosphere, the harmony of colours, and the relief of objects. He was naturally therefore excellent in architectural painting, and, in point of technique, he advanced the practice of oil-colouring in Italy. The majority of his pictures were painted in oil, then a comparatively new medium for colours, and he carried out many improvements in the usage of this vehicle.

The earliest trace that we find of Piero as a painter is in 1439, when he was an apprentice of Dominico Veneziano, and assisted him in painting the Chapel of Sant' Egidio, in Santa Maria Novella of Florence. Towards 1450 he is said to have been with the same artist in Loreto; nothing of his, however, can now be identified in that locality. In 1451 he was by himself, painting in Rimini, where a fresco still remains. Prior to this he had executed some extensive frescoes in the Vatican, by the order of Pope Nicholas V, but these were destroyed when Raphael undertook on the same walls the *Liberation of St. Peter* and other paintings by command of Julius II. His most extensive extant series of frescoes is in the choir of San Francesco in Arezzo, the *History of the Cross,* beginning with legendary subjects of the Death and Burial of Adam, and going on to the Entry of Heraclius into Jerusalem after the Overthrow of Chrosroes. This series is, in relation to its period, remarkable for effect, movement, and mastery of the nude. The subject of the Vision of Constantine is particularly vigorous in chiaroscuro, and a preparatory design of the same composition was so highly effective that it used to be ascribed to Giorgione. A noted fresco at Borgo San Sepolcro, the *Resurrection,* may be later than this series; it is preserved in the Falazzo de' Conservatori. An important painting of the *Flagellation of Christ,* in the Cathedral of Urbino, is later still, probably towards 1470. Piero appears to have been much in his native town of Borgo San Sepolcro from about 1445, and more especially after 1454, where he finished the series in Arezzo. He grew rich there, and there he died, being buried in October, 1492.

Piero used to work assiduously from clay models swathed in wet draperies producing a multitude of folds. Luca Signorelli was his pupil, and probably to some extent Perugino; and his own influence, furthered by that of Signorelli, was potent over all Italy. Belonging as he does to the Umbrian School, he united with that style something of the Siennese and more of the Florentine mode.

Two statements made by Vasari regarding Piero della Francesca are open to controversy. He says that Piero became blind at the age of sixty, which cannot be true, as he continued painting for some years later; but scepticism need perhaps hardly go to the extent of inferring that he was never blind at all. Vasari also says that Fra Luca Pacioli, a disciple of

Piero in scientific matters, defrauded his memory by appropriating his researches without acknowledgment. This is hard upon the friar, who constantly shows a great reverence for his master in the sciences. One of Pacioli's books was published in 1509, and speaks of Piero as still living. Hence it has been propounded that Piero lived to the patriarchal age of ninety-four or upwards; but, as it is now stated that he was buried in 1492, we must infer that there is some mistake in relation to Pacioli's remark, perhaps the date of writing was several years earlier than that of publication. Piero was known to have left a manuscript of his own on perspective; this remained undiscovered till a recent date, when it was found in the Ambrozia Library of Milan, ascribed to some suppositious "Pietro, pittore di Bruges."

In the London National Gallery are four paintings attributed to Piero della Francesca. One of them, a profile of Isotta da Rimini, may be safely rejected. *The Baptism of Christ,* which used to be the Altar-piece of the Priory of the Baptist in Borgo San Sepolcro, is an important example; and still more so the *Nativity,* with the Virgin kneeling, and five angels singing to musical instruments.

MADONNA AND CHILD

BY FRA FILIPPO LIPPI

THE FOLLOWING IS A TRANSCRIPTION OF THE
DUVEEN BROCHURE, TOGETHER WITH
MORE RECENT MATERIAL REGARDING THE

MADONNA AND CHILD

LA MADONNA DELLA STELLA

BY

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI

FLORENTINE SCHOOL

CIRCA 1406-1469

A FIFTEENTH CENTURY

TEMPERA PAINTING ON WOOD

FROM THE MONASTERY OF
THE CARMINE BRETHREN
FLORENCE, ITALY

MADONNA AND CHILD

BY FRA FILIPPO LIPPI

The Virgin, with head half turned and inclined towards the right, is represented as a half length figure, in the act of tenderly caressing the Child, whom she supports with both arms; the left leg of the Child resting on her right arm, whilst the right leg drops comfortably behind. The Child is clothed in a winding drapery of purple hue, and grasps with the left hand the folds of the Virgin's head-dress as it falls on her neck, and with the right hand He touches His chin, His head being turned towards the spectator, and inclined slightly backward.

The Virgin is clad in a dark green hooded mantle with wide gold trimming, fastened with an open strap of embroidered gold across the breast, under which she wears a crimson garment pleated from the neck downwards. On the right shoulder of the mantle is an embroidered star, expressing her title, according to allusion,—"La Madonna della Stella." The head-dress, exposing a small quantity of fair hair, is of frilled muslin continued in a loose twist on the neck. The halos of the Mother and Child are of gold, each radiating with impressed lines from the centre, and stippled with dot-pattern. The background is composed of a loosely hanging drapery of gold brocade, also stippled with dot-pattern.

. . . . . .

In this Madonna there is a certain simplicity and dignity, together with a beautiful tenderness of feeling and motherly love. There is every probability that Lucrezia Buti, the young nun of the Convent of Santa Margherita, served as a model for this picture, a theory which is all the more acceptable as true if a comparison of the features is made with those which Fra Filippo portrayed in the celebrated *tondo* now in the Pitti Palace at Florence. We have here the same high forehead, the same expressive eyes, the full lips, the dilated nostrils, the slightly dimpled chin, which give the girlish face such a strangely fascinating interpretation. The type of the Virgin's head, like most of those of Fra Filippo, is oval and modelled broadly in a low and flattened relief. The neck is, as usual, slender, whilst the Child is healthy, robust, and short necked, a peculiarity of extreme infancy.

It cannot be denied that Filippo's love for Lucrezia inspired some of his finest works. Besides the Pitti *tondo* the sad, sweet face of the young nun excites our compassion and admiration, as she gazes down upon us in

all humility from the frescoes of the Duomo; and she may be traced through the whole series of panel pictures executed during the Prato period. The colouring, too, is always rich and harmonious, and Masaccio's influence is evident in the modelling of this Virgin's head and hands, and in the graceful lines of the drapery.

Vasari tells us, "Truly marvellous was the grace with which he painted, and very perfect the harmony that he gave to his works, for which he has been ever esteemed by craftsmen and honoured by our modern masters with consummate praise; nay, so long as the voracity of time allows his many excellent labours to live, he will be held in veneration by every age."

Dimensions: Height, 32⅝ *inches; width,* 24¾ *inches.*

BERNHARD BERENSON

AUTHOR OF "THE STUDY AND CRITICISM OF ITALIAN ART"

"LORENZO LOTTO"

"FLORENTINE PAINTERS OF THE RENAISSANCE", ETC.

IN A LETTER RELATING TO FRA FILIPPO LIPPI'S

"MADONNA AND CHILD"

"It is a painting of exquisite, tender feeling, fine composition, and very beautiful colour. Indeed, I can recall no other picture by this most human of Florentine painters which is so glowing and so radiant.

"I am at present writing about Giovanni Bellini, and I am very much struck by the resemblance, not only in the feeling but in the pattern as well, between this Madonna of Fra Filippo's and some of the great Venetian's early Madonnas. There is good reason for it, because both drew their inspiration directly from Donatello; and, besides, Fra Filippo left works at Padua which the young Bellini may well have known.

"One wishes that, like Bellini, Fra Filippo had painted more such tender, thoughtful Madonnas, and of such delightful colour. Unhappily, they are rare, scarcely half a dozen are at all the equal of this."

MR. WALTER PACH, COMMENTING ON "LA MADONNA DELLA STELLA" BY FRA FILIPPO LIPPI IN THE CARL W. HAMILTON COLLECTION

This painting is evidently one of the most perfect that the Quattrocento has bequeathed to us. More, perhaps, than any other work by the master, the present picture shows the continuance into the period of scientific naturalism of the sense of beauty transcending naturalism that had characterized Mediaeval art and that found a last great expression in Fra Angelico. It has been said that the twenty years by which Filippo was younger than the great Dominican rendered impossible that complete detachment from mundane qualities which caused Fra Angelico to be spoken of as *Beato.* Such a work as the present one argues against such an idea—one formed, doubtless from Madonnas by Filippo like the one with the landscape background in the Uffizi. During two months when I was copying a picture by Signorelli in the same room, I had the amplest occasion to study this famous work. Before it one does indeed feel that the century's curiosity about the "things seen by the eyes" has led the painter away from the noble abstraction of the Trecento and substituted minor, personal interests for the universality of a Giotto or even a Bernardo Daddi or a Lorenzetti. It is the note of such men as these that is continued by the picture in Mr. Hamilton's collection, which attains its impressiveness by uniting the austere purity of the inherited tradition with the new and warm humanity that had its adorable dawn in Fra Filippo's lifetime.

EXCERPT FROM AN ARTICLE ON THE CARL W. HAMILTON COLLECTION BY MALCOLM VAUGHN FROM "THE ART NEWS SUPPLEMENT" OF APRIL 27, 1929

"The picture is by Van Marle considered—on Valentiner's authority—the only early Fra Filippo privately owned in America. Van Marle points out that the Madonna corresponds in type to the other earliest works of the artist, four 'Adorations'—one in the Cook Collection, Richmond, apparently earliest of all, two in the Uffizi and one in the Kaiser-Friedrich. The Hamilton Fra Filippo, called 'The Madonna of the Star,' from the fact that a star is embroidered on the shoulder of her mantle, is conceived with lofty tenderness and combines realism and sentiment. The picture comes from the monastery of the Carmine Brethern, Florence. There is only a hint of Gothic art evident in it, the style being almost classical. In this respect, the picture—painted while the artist was under the influence of Fra Angelico—serves as a significant link between the Gothic tradition of Lorenzo Monaco and the early Renaissance as represented by Fra Angelico.

"As is to be expected from Fra Filippo, the attitude suggests nothing of Gothic stiffness and convention; instead, is strikingly natural, human, realistic. This realism, being wholesome, lends force. Both the Virgin and the Child are instinct with life and energy. Their individualites are as clearly rendered as if the work were portraiture. Portraits they doubtless are, though the legend that Fra Filippo's mistress from a nunnery—Lucretia Buti—posed for the Madonna, is no longer credible. According to Van Marle, the Hamilton Madonna was painted before the Madonna in the gallery of Corneto Tarquinia, which is dated 1437; Lucretia Buti was at that time an infant, her affair with Fra Filippo not commencing much before 1456. Perhaps the Hamilton Virgin was an early love. In any event, both She and the Child are based on quite real persons of the period. In Her face and bearing is a touch of suave spirituality. This much spirituality was not to fall very long from the brush of the Carmelite brother. His mind became swiftly material. To be sure, his material nature fitted him for his role of realist. Without it, he would surely not have become so brave a precursor of the Renaissance.

"The strong drawing in 'The Madonna of the Star' reveals a master's comprehension of plastic form. It might be described as the first utterance of modern art even though its modeling holds close to the principles of *quattrocento* sculpture. In outline it is hard, sharp and distinct; in contour, round and soft. Quite characteristic of the artist is the fine construction of the two heads.

"The Virgin's expressive face, cast in the mould peculiar to Fra Filippo, resembles in type that of the Pitti tondo and the Virgin's face in the 'Life of Christ' predella in the Galleria Communale, Prato. The same is true of the Child's face. And the Child's face recalls that in the Uffizi 'Nativity,' though the latter is considerably out of drawing."

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI

CIRCA 1406-1469

Filippo was the son of Tommasso Lippi, a butcher by trade, and was born in the Contrada dell' Ardiglione in Florence, behind the Convent of the Carmine, about the year 1406. Soon after his birth his mother, Mona Antonia, died, preceding his father's decease by two years, which left Filippo an orphan in the hands of an aunt, Mona Lapaccia, Tommasso's sister. At the age of eight years, however, his aunt was unable to continue the duties of a mother owing to her poverty, and she entrusted the boy to the care of the friars of the neighbouring convent. Seven years later, in 1421, when Filippo was about fifteen years of age, he was registered in the Carmelite community, having taken the vows of a friar, judging, however, from later events, more from necessity than inclination. From that time till 1432 he remained an inmate of the monastery, devoting himself to his profession of painting, and coming under the potent influence of Masolino and Masaccio, whose beautiful frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel undeniably inspired the friar during the whole of his artistic life. Masaccio may be called the pioneer of naturalism in Italian painting, and his expression received its strongest impulse from the Florentine friar, who, eventually breaking his monastic vows at the age of twenty-six, and being stirred by all the passions of his time, boldly and successfully shattered the fetters of religious painting. By degrees without any apparent effort, merely by a natural expansion of sympathy, the human type with all its variations was substituted for the monotony of the traditional type divine. Madonnas became living virgins and real mothers, lovingly invested by the painter with the beauty of maidens whom he admired and of mothers such as he could understand. He was the first to represent in painting the Virgin as a real Florentine mother in all her youthful human beauty; the first also to render in a way that was true to nature the plump baby form of the infant Jesus. In this respect Robert Browning has summed up the charm and feeling of Fra Filippo's work in his well-known poem on the painter, where the monks criticize his work because of his venturing to paint nature as he sees it.

The moment chosen by the friar for his return to the world could not have been more favourable. At the time when Florence was going through

a glorious transition, he painted his great picture *The Coronation of the Virgin* which, according to Vasari, brought him to the notice of Cosimo de' Medici, the ruler of Florence, with whom he found himself in high favour. At times the friar was given to idle and dissolute habits, which, it is said, sorely tried his patron, but on the whole Cosimo seems to have regarded his escapades with indulgence.

Early in the year 1442, upon the recommendation of Cosimo de' Medici, the Pope appointed Filippo Lippi perpetual Abbot and Rector of San Quirico, at Legnaja, near Florence. A period of comparative prosperity now began, marred, however, in the year 1450, by a most unscrupulous act on his part in forging the signature to a receipt in favour of one of his assistants. This brought the friar to the rack, upon which he was tortured so unmercifully that he was finally driven to confess his crime, but it was not until five years later that he was relieved of his benefice.

After this humiliating affair Fra Filippo left Florence and retired to Prato, where, nothing daunted, he was appointed chaplain to the nuns of the Convent of Santa Margherita early in the following year. It was in this convent that he was attracted by the singular grace and beauty of one of the young nuns, Lucrezia Buti, who sat to him for the portrait of the *Madonna of the Girdle,* now in the Prato Gallery. From this time she was destined to play an important *rôle* in his future career, and to figure frequently in his Madonna pictures. On the occasion of a certain festival Filippo abducted Lucrezia, and carried her off to his own dwelling, for which he was deprived of his chaplaincy. Through the intercession of Cosimo de' Medici, however, the Pope, Pius II, was prevailed upon to grant them a special brief of absolution from their monastic vows, allowing them to marry. They were always devotedly attached to each other, and two children were born to them, one being Filippino Lippo, whose fame as a painter afterwards even rivalled that of his father.

The last field of Fra Filippo's labours was the town of Spoleto, where he was called upon to paint the choir of the Cathedral. Thither he went in 1467, dying there two years afterwards, away from his family, at the age of sixty-three.

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